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INDIAN WOMEN AND ART IN LIFE

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INDIAN WOMEN AND ART IN LIFE

BOOKS BY

KANAIYALAL H. VAKIL

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Panoramic India ...	„ 10/-
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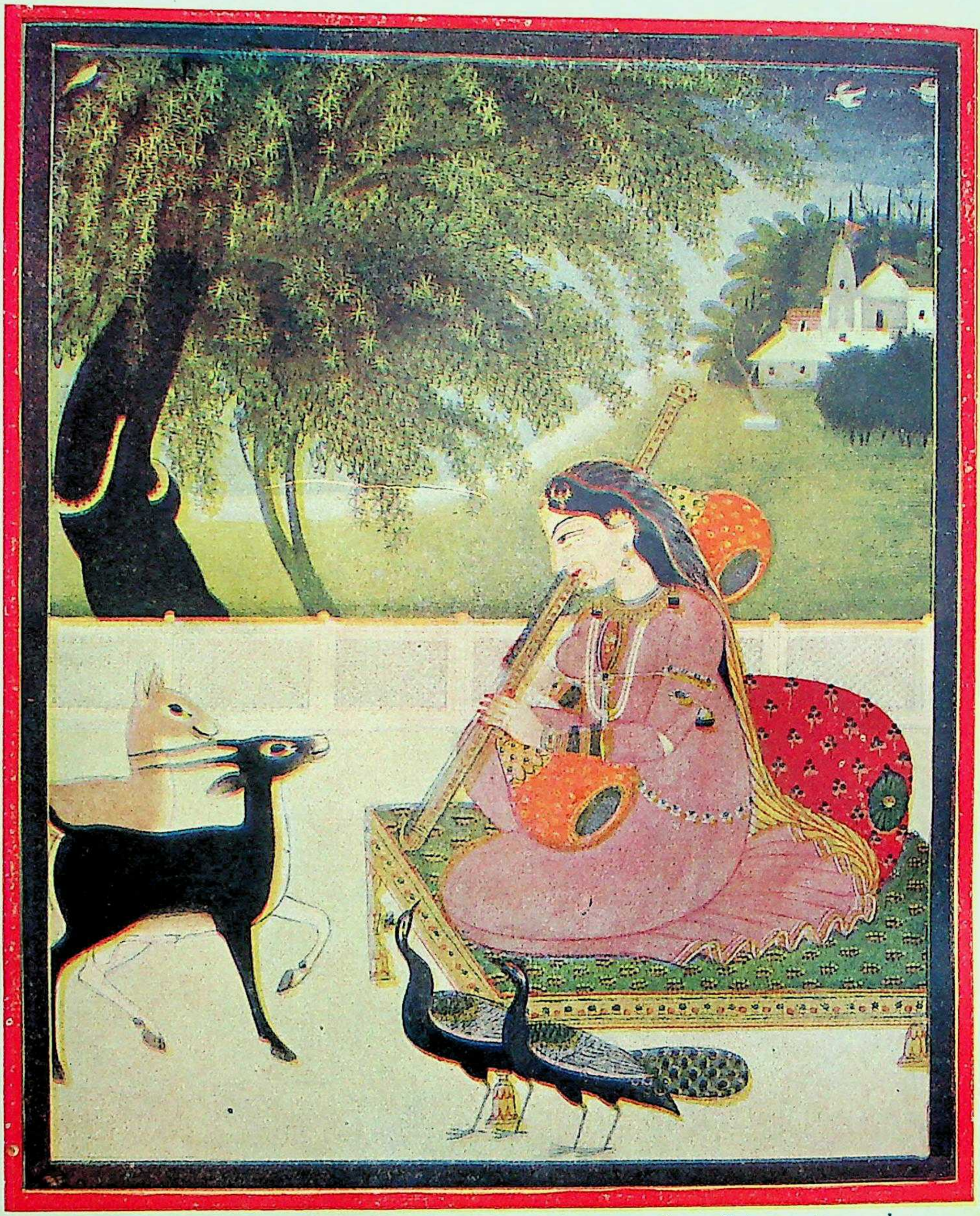
THE MELODY OF PEACE.



The tranquil beauty you see in this picture is beauty as she still lingers in our homes. She lingers and, quite likely, may languish unless and until art and beauty are welcomed and enthroned in the home, until once again they inspire the creative artist.

[See Pages 10 & 13]

Indian Women and Art

In Life

BY

KANAIYALAL H. VAKIL, B. A., L. L. B.

Author, "At Ajanta," "Panoramic India,"
"Rock-Cut Temples Around Bombay."
Art Critic, "The Bombay Chronicle"
Jt. Editor, The Roopa-Lekha."

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For the first three pictures of ancient Indian paintings and the modern painting "Bhakta Haridas" reproduced here, I am indebted to my friend Syt. Kallianji Curumsey Damji who loaned them from his collection.

"*In fact, the study of Indian miniature painting on the whole, if it is taken as representing India's chief contribution to art, as might be supposed from the amount of attention devoted to it in recent years, is hardly likely to lead much further than to add one more subject to the connoisseur's hobbies and another department to the art dealer's business.*"

E. B. HAVELL.

INTRODUCTION.

Events that are and will be history have revealed the international scale not less of the aspirations than of the problems of modern humanity. Nothing of intrinsic value, nothing that touches human life vitally, could be of intrinsic value or be vital except internationally. Life, thought and endeavour are all driven converging towards the sharply focussed international view-points. Anything, concept or deed, that is aggressively individual or, to use the stock phrase beloved of the jaded exponent of Indian art and culture, nationally "unique" is, immediately and rightly, suspected by the alert modern mind as anti-social and as a positive obstacle to international understanding, activities and aspirations.

The time-spirit has touched, indisputably, the women of India. Every form and phase of the purdah, social, communal and even national which hitherto segregated individuals, communities and nations, one from another, is earnestly sought to be removed and the hostile units are brought together for the great international re-union they aim. In the belief that the periodic conferences, grown and increased of late, of the women of India have been animated by that aim and with the kind assistance of one its organisers, Srimati Hansa Mehta, who offered me the opportunity, I endeavoured, nearly three years ago, to place before the Bombay sessions of the All-India Women's Conference what I have been convinced should be the right and the rational approach which is indispensable for the understanding and fruitful appreciation of the priceless heritage and future of art in India. If the reconstructive forces which at present possess the country leave the place, definite responsibilities and possibilities of the advancement of women in India unlocated, these would soon be dispossessed of enduring significance and value. I have attempted to indicate in the pages which follow not only the possibilities and place in national and international life of the women of India I have emphasised as well their definite responsibilities

It will be observed that I do not believe in art independently of life or of human values; in education independently of its root-foundation in humanly and socially purposive daily vocations. Art is not a superfluous, avoidable, intellectual or emotional exercise or anti-social luxury. It is a vocation and a daily necessity of educated life. It has nothing to do with memorised learning unrelated to the realities of daily life. My insistence on art is thus two-fold. Art recalls, in the first place, the fact that education cannot be superimposed. Secondly, it illustrates and re-establishes the truth that art, education and culture must proceed from within and actively direct the collective life and needs of the people. Judged by that standard, the loudly and continuously trumpeted "revival" of Indian art has almost entirely failed. It has failed to cultivate the right approach to art and failed to acquire the understanding and fruitful appreciation of art which alone could make it an integral element of the collective educated life and needs of the people. If the women of India could understand the character and extent of the failure, they could, if they so aspire and as they should, remedy it. The task is one of their definite responsibilities.

Mr. E. B. Havell has been, rightly, acclaimed as the originator of the second, more articulate and more

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diffused phase of the "revival" of Indian art. Without Havell, Bengal at least would have remained without its "revival" in painting It is thus important to note that the failure, I have tried to indicate, has revealed the transparent phase when even he could no longer hide it. He says:-*"I agree with Mr. K. H. Vakil that" most of the fundamental problems affecting the practical conditions of art in India and the daily difficulties of the creative artists, have still, unfortunately, remained problems.' The Indian intelligentsia for the most part have been too absorbed in stirring the witches' cauldron of the politician to give undivided attention to the provision of the wholesome artistic food which is necessary for India's body and soul. I do not disparage individual efforts or those of exclusive coteries which offer "puja" to art in their own homes and select society gatherings, but it is easy to exaggerate their importance as long as the great body of India's traditional craftsmen remain unhelped or outside their scope. The promise which these 'revivals' hold out has yet to be fulfilled. I cannot accept Mr. Vakil's invitation to discuss the vitality of these 'revivals' and to prophesy upon the future progress or decline of any of them." But he expresses the disappointment that "the revived interest in art which I helped to create among educated Indians has not gone further and deeper."

It can never be
as the ground work
to build -

I shall not for the moment discuss the logic of the mental attitude which could expect "exclusive coteries" which offer "puja" at their own cosy firesides and "select" social gatherings ever to give scope to or to help "the great body of India's craftsmen." But the moment has, decidedly, arrived to review not only the vitality but the significance as well of the "revival" that has disappointed Mr. Havell and left unfulfilled, as he remarks, the promise which it held out. For, interest in art has, fortunately, gone much further than the "revived" easel and "miniature" paintings about which the sentimental antiquarians have not yet, unfortunately, ceased romancing about and, unquestionably, much further than the "exclusive coteries" and "select" social gatherings responsible for imposing false values of art, past and present.

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* The "Roopa-Lekha" (Vol. II No. 7 & 8)-1930.

The re-awakened interest in art among the women of India, for example, needs more than the sentimental fervour of the antiquarians and, obviously, more than the empty ritual of the "puja" which is all that the "exclusive coteries" and "select" social gatherings have been hitherto offering. The re-awakened interest in other forms of painting and of art beside easel and "miniature" paintings, "revived" and more often than not reproduced from the past, renders it completely essential that the unconscious weaknesses and deliberate mistakes found in the "revived" paintings should not again overtake them or recur in other forms of art now re-emerging from continued obscurity.

There have been few, very few indeed, who have been able to analyse so clearly the decline of art in India as Mr. Havell. But the characteristic weakness of Mr. Havell and his colleagues and followers has been the inability to follow in their remedies for "revival" the logic of their analysis. And, it could be said of Havell as it has been said of Ruskin that when we turn from his preaching "to the practice of his followers and coevals, we shall find it by no means so spirited."* The cult of romanticism found in Havell as in Ruskin "its supreme champion in its invasion of architecture, and, armed *cap-a-pie* with moral references, false analogies, fact-proof dogmatisms, he won a decisive and calamitous victory." In his own disappointment and the admitted unfulfilment of its promise we see already the calamitous aspects of the victorious "revival" Havell helped to intiate.

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* "The Pleasures of Architecture" by C. and A. William Ellis.

He now, naturally, prefers, as he has preferred, to make of the politician and the general community of the intelligentsia the convenient scapegoat. But his preference is, transparently, the preference of a special pleader. As a sober, indisputable, fact which can be observed in every quarter where Indian art has been, noticed, appreciated or discussed; in periodicals, English and Indian; in social gatherings, public meetings and conferences, the Indian intelligentsia whom he choses, unjustly, to blame and, even the politician whom he calmly stigmatises have demonstrated for the "revival" whole-hearted devotion and blind faith which he could not have expected in any other civilised modern country outside India. If, therefore, the "revival" has been a disappointment and has failed to fulfil the promise it held out, it is due chiefly and directly to those "exclusive coteries" and "select" class that have accepted with undisguised glee its fruits but failed to grasp its weaknesses, limitations, purpose, its ultimate objectives and vital significance.

not politicians
but government

The "revived" interest in art, thus influenced, soon degenerated. It lost its collective, nation-wide, appeal, spirit and inspiration and became entirely apologetic of the past, negative, provincial and ego-centric. It misinterpreted the past, misled the present and missed the future of art in India. For it removed art from its live contacts with daily life and immediate surroundings, made it the pastime of "exclusive coteries" and "select" groups and creeds, fettered the vision as well as the workmanship of the creative artist, whole-heartedly exploited "popular" credulity and vulgarised public taste. Where the historic context and the significant processes of the historic evolution of Indian art could not be overlooked, they were conveniently twisted and misapplied to suit the fashion in "schools" and "styles".

The literal transcript from the surviving fragments of literature on Indian art were with amazing indifference made to serve pre-conceived theories and concepts magically and with sickening regularity transformed as "ideals" of Indian art. And, the "ideals" of art thus dug out and shaped turned out to be such a profitable game with "select" lyric groups and "exclusive coteries" that it ceased to be anybody's business to observe the actual objects of Indian art surviving from the past. The "ideals" of Indian art thus patterned for the set fashions in "schools" and "styles" rendered all positive information about art superfluous, all manifestions of discriminate judgment heretic and all gestures of the creative vision un-"authentic."

The function of the creative artist was, according to the romantic antiquarians, to belong to the "school" and cultivate the "style" moulded by literary concepts and extraneous and super-imposed "ideals." He could not and did not see life, understand or seek inspiration from life and its environment. All he was expected to do and generally attempted to do was to stick to the approved technical formula reproduced from the past, entirely and mechanically.

9 Art was reduced to something worse than being for art's sake. It was pushed to the depth of art for technique's sake. And, it has been one of the most

instructive features of the romantic "revival" that this mechanical reproduction of technique and surface mannerisms has been universally and with pathetic attachment accepted as an exhilarating genuine manifestation of the "ideals" of Indian art! The set, standardised themes, compositions, colour and execution of the "revived" paintings are more than eloquent testimony to the romantic sentiment and "ideals" that have destroyed art, its vitality as well as significance.

That is style without it no school could live - only the building had no foundation - only Tagore & [illegible] could draw

Popular credulity thus exploited and public taste thus vulgarised for over thirty years could not, obviously, be expected to respond intelligently or fruitfully. Fed and fostered on sentiment and superlatives and anaemic "ideals", they could offer no more than the anaemic outlook and hectic fervour. The "schools" and "styles" of Indian Art that became so many trade labels increased the clever craftsman who reproduced with profitable fidelity the technical formula which the exponent of the "revival" "with grotesque docility," recalled by Sister Nivedita, passed on as indicative of the "ideals" of Indian art. The trade of the antique dealer, in every sense of the term, has been flourishing, thanks to the romantic antiquarians of the "revival." In fact, it has reached the stage when it is impossible to distinguish the dealer in antique from the student or exponent of Indian art or from the artist of "revived" paintings. The term "ideals" of Indian art has been the stock-in-trade of the "revivalists." No other single term or phrase has wrought such wide-spread mischief, closed all avenues of fruitful research of the country's heritage in art and blocked effectively the path of the creative artist as that term. Used at first justifiably and with perceptible discrimination against the onslaught of uninformed Western criticism, it is now used invariably as convenient and facile defensive tactics for every kind of apology, mistaken as appreciation or exposition, of art in India, past and present. Art in India must now outgrow that apologetic, negative, phase. Its distinct significance has been generally long recognised. It must now face the gaze and stand the test of those who seek in it the elements of universal, permanent and positive values of art, not merely the elements that are nationally "unique" and exclusive.

The women of India, if they so determine, can assist substantially art in India towards its reconstructive or rather progressively positive phase of vitality and growth. They can stop its provincial and egocentric decadence and raise it to its legitimate status, not less international than inter-provincial.

how?

Art cannot be, should not be, a literary pastime. The literary labels and the abstract "ideals" of the romantic "revivalist" have all but choked its growth and advancement in India by overlooking the objects of art from the past and by supressing the creative necessities and environment of art in the present. Art now claims its freedom and independent status. And, it looks to the women of India, educated in art, to re-establish beauty in the daily environment of life, civic as well as economic, social as well as domestic. Art will thus cease to be the property and anti-social luxury of "exclusive coteries". It will proceed from within the community assisted by its daily demands. It will no longer be super-imposed. Responding to the collective needs and aspirations of the people, it will respond helpfully to the international events that lead modern humanity towards international re-union. This is, I believe, one of the definite responsibilities and mission of the enlightened women of India.

Cart before the horse

"VILLA VASANT"
Santa Cruz, December 1932.

K. H. V.

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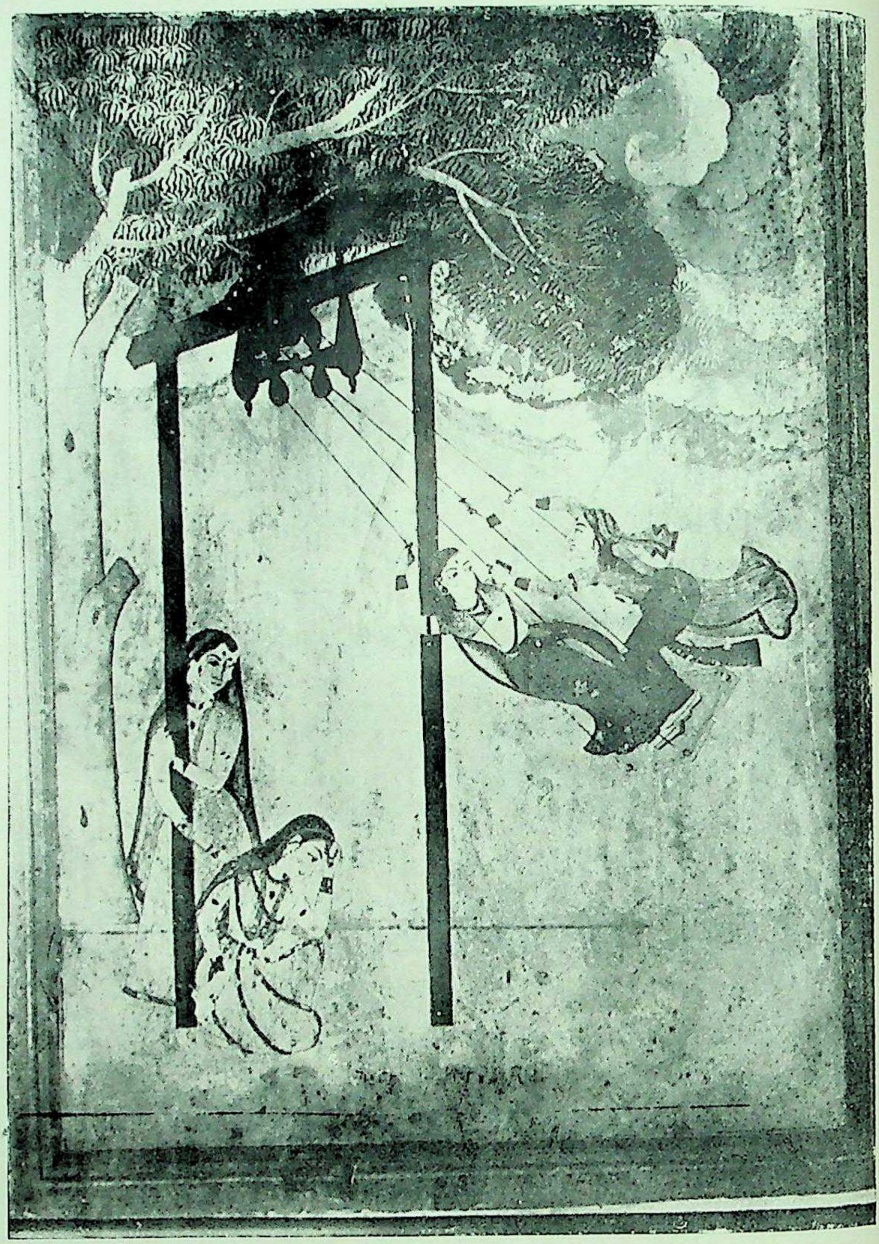
INDIAN WOMEN AND ART IN LIFE

"The so-called wicked, nineties, with their pale, aesthetic Pre-Raphaelites, bequeathed to the twentieth century a subtle sentimentality which destroyed vigourous art."

WALTER STARKIE (*"Luigi Pirandello"*)

THE "HINDOLA"



Here is the swing in the picture and the brush of the Rajput artist has not only given the beauty of the Indian *Sari* Sister Nivedita looked for the artist has also given us the feeling of open air life, gentle breeze, of art intimate with life.

[See Pages 10 & 13.]

"So is art sacrificed on the altar of culture, the culture itself being false and fraudulent."

W. J. TURNER.

It is natural and it is right that I should address those who more than any other section of the community, can, if they so determine, help art and culture to humanise the values of life. Without them, life would be an aimless struggle. With them, life translates itself as a social enterprise. And, it is to these inter-provincial social enterprises, misnamed conferences, one naturally turns for the breaking down of provincial barriers that exist between workers in the common field of national advancement. The inter-provincial exchange of ideas and information in art, historic research and culture for inter-provincial understanding can alone lead to the nation-wide outlook in art, to the nation-wide search and enrichment of art and culture.

It is and should be the particular mission of the women of India to re-cement the cultural contacts between the different provinces in the country. And, it is for them, obviously and naturally, to re-welcome art and beauty in the homes and thus provide the vital inspiration to a "movement" which without their active co-operation threatens to degenerate, if it has not yet completely degenerated, into an empty, academic and romantic "revival." I believe it is absolutely essential that every conference or periodic assemblage of women, concerned with the economic and cultural advancement of the women of India should discuss and decide a time-limited programme of work that could not only improve and beautify Indian homes but thus provide vocational education and employment to them as well.

Inter-provincial Contacts

The task would be impossible, evidently, until information from all provinces is constantly and systematically co-ordinated and their art activities dispassionately examined and estimated. If I refer, therefore, particularly to some of the art activities on this side of the country, as I propose to do presently, it is to serve as the basis for the dispassionate study of those eager to grasp the nation-wide implications and magnitude of our legacy of illimitable wealth in art.

May I, therefore, request that these conferences whenever and wherever they assemble must seriously endeavour to make a dispassionate periodic survey and examination of the art conditions and activities at least, or rather to begin with, in their immediate neighbourhood? Academic essays on the *importance* of vocational education, of art and culture or outworn platitudes on the *glories* of ancient culture or on the stereotyped romancing of the "revival" will lead nowhere. Art and culture are, have been and should be, linked intimately with the everyday problems of life. And, they must be discussed and solved as practicable and intelligent propositions.

Standardised Conceptions

If I omit all mention of dates, of so-called "schools" and "styles", of iconography, "conventions" and "symbols", it is to indicate and emphasise the direct and intimate approach to the permanent values of art. The domain, particularly, of Indian art is sadly overrun by "historians," archaeologists, theologians, professional priests and "mystics", both professional and amateur, as well as by chanting rhetoricians. Their devastating sentimentalism has seen and even called for only uniformity where there is and should be unity. Their standards of art are only standardised

The permanent value of
art can only be
studied by the history
of art, which means
not dates & schools

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conceptions and cant. Their superlatives offer the adjective, not the positive or specific values of art.

They have thus failed to see the relation between art and life and historic environment, one form and locality of art and another.

Local Enviroment and Achievement

The importance of local environment in art has been practically overlooked by those who study Indian art from text-book "histories" as misleading about Indian art as they have been about India. The current appreciation of Indian art has been randomly and, not infrequently, wantonly diffused by stock terms of criticism and appreciation which obstruct vision and obscure the meaning and values of Indian art. It has not been founded and strengthened either by descriptive values or by the precise knowledge of its historic evolution. The current colourful references to past "schools" and "styles" or "conventions" and "symbols" of Indian art are as much or as little history as the inane enumeration of wars and glorious dynasties have been history for the pre-Victorian school teacher. Leave alone their historic evolution, the historic context and sequence of the different forms and the different phases of the growth of Indian art have been, practically, unnoticed even now.

Significance of Place.

I shall not apologise for citing here the words of a sister who belonged to the race of artists, who had the courage of the undaunted artist. For, she, evidently, had a better conception of the processes of history and a wider outlook about its creative functions than those pseudo-archaeologists and antiquarians, whose historic outlook is very definitely and rigidly restricted to dates, "origins" and "influence". Heavy blinkers still shut off the wide expanses of Indian art. Sister Nivedita saw it without the blinkers. She saw India, understood India, but did not flatter, or worse, humour Indians. Nor did she slander them. She had the vision and the wisdom of the beauty that has been India. "Fight", she said, like a Rajput heroine. Like a Rajput heroine, she taunts the doubting Arjuns to noble manhood. Let Sister Nivedita speak. For, she speaks direct from the heart, direct to the heart, as an artist to artists, as one whose vision of beauty is crystal clear and dynamic. The history of India has to be, she says, "humanised, emotionalised, made the trumpet-voice and evangel of the races that inhabit India.

why end

did the peasant in
Bengal know
about Ajanta -

"And to do this, it must be re-connected with place. Calcutta, Madras, and Bombay, are the present viewpoints. Surely the heroes that sleep on ancient battlefields, the forefathers that made for them the wide-walled cities, the scholars that left behind them precious thought and script, have laughed sometimes when they have not wept to see from high heaven the grotesque docility of their descendants.

Deeper Research

"The history of India, consists in truth of the strata, of at least three thousand years, ocean-bed and river-sands, forest and marsh, and ocean-floor again lie piled one upon the other—and in each period some new point is the centre. Ayodhya and Hastinapur, Indraprastha and Pattliputra, Ujjain and Delhi, Conjeevaram and Amravati, what of the vanished worlds of which all these were born? India's whole hope lies in a deeper research, a more rigid investigation of facts. With her encouragement, and not despair, is on the side of truth."

The New Spirit

We in Bombay, insignificant in number, and unaided by publicity agents, insignificant, perhaps in prominence, are fighting with that spirit of research and dispassionate examination, fighting against the high-priests of art, interested in creeds and castes, in province and "schools", on the one hand and the high-priests of finance interested in erecting class barriers, warehouses, tenements and slums on the other.

With the kind assistance of friends I have been able to collect some of the necessary material. And, as we proceed in our analysis of the architectural elements of the surviving achievements at Ellora, Elephanta, Karli, Ajanta Madura, Trapury, Baroli, Khajuraho, Trichinapoli, Abu, Gwalior, Delhi, Agra, Ahmedabad, Udaipur and Java we shall be able to realise clearly how their knowledge and inspiration is stimulating the evolution and change in environment in this city, in Bombay and its suburbs, which can be traced, say, from the Gateway of India, the Prince of Wales Museum, the Readymoney House, the General Post Office, in street and domestic architecture, school buildings, commercial buildings, doorways and fountains.

What Bathos

Stale Information.

Despite these facts, these living realities in brick and mortar and cement and wood, this tangible and concrete basis for the survey, study, criticism and appreciation of the modern endeavours and conditions of Indian architecture, I have been able to illustrate this evening with the slides, the efforts for its reconstruction, have gone, among the high-priests of the romantic "revival", no further than elaborate literary citations from "authorities" from abroad that were up-to-date thirty years ago! They have failed to see what is nearer home. They see the truth about architecture in imported books and theories, not in actual buildings.

that is what he has done

They have made no effort to survey, much less to review, the conditions that have changed since Havell wrote decades ago on Indian architecture. They write what Havell wrote, without the slightest reference to the changed conditions actually existing. During the period of fourteen years which elapsed between the first and the second edition of Havell's book on Indian architecture, he could not, perhaps, obtain first-hand information that would have increased materially the informative character of his book. *But that is not half as deplorable as the fact that his followers *in India*, able to obtain better information, should have mechanically reproduced even at this moment the stale information from Havell. This is characteristic of the manner in which Indian art is written about, discussed and expounded by romantic "revivalists", here and abroad.

Not an Academic Movement

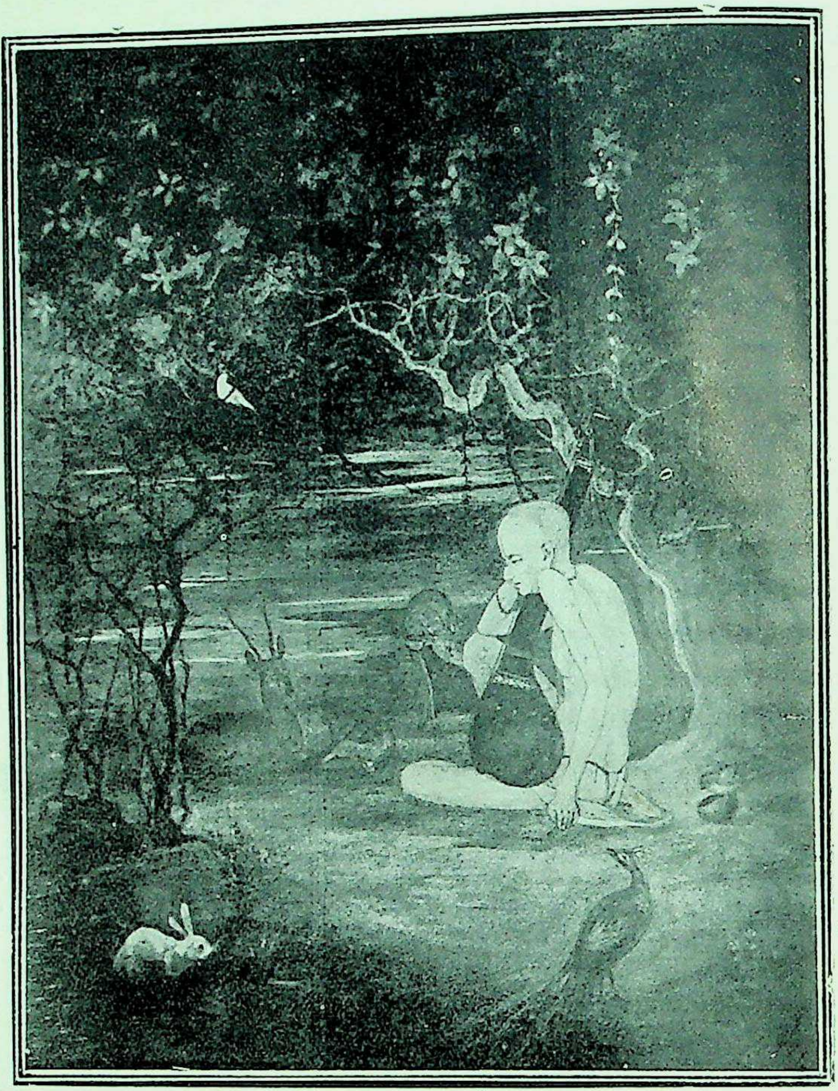
Who are they whom he is reviling?

And, since the orthodox critics and "mystic" exponents of Indian art in India touch nothing that is not at least thirty years old and certified by "authorities" abroad as "Indian", since the majority of these pundits see the beginning and end of the revival of Indian art in eased painting, our fight for the claims of beauty in environment has not yet been classified as a "movement"! Our sermons are in stones, wood, brick and mortar and even cement, not

---

*Typical of the blind faith of the inbelligentsia and of its archaic mental attitude, rubber-stamped over thirty years ago, by the romantic antiquarians are the following statements. They were not found in an ordinary periodical of passing importance. They were in the Journal (Vol XVII 1932, Parts III - IV) of the Bihar And Orissa "Research" Society! After reading my book on "Rock-Cut Temples Around Bombay," the erudite writer asks me with undisguised fury, "Has the author read the books of Mr. Havell?" And, he ends with a remark, rather strange to have appeared in the Journal of a society which calls itself a "Research" Society, "whatever is new in the book is, unacceptable." This is the species of mind produced by the romantic antiquarians. Nothing new is acceptable to them unless it has been certified from abroad as correct and "Indian," and sufficiently stale, outworn and outgrown in truth!

"BHAKTA HARIDAS"



(SYT. KALLIANJI CURUMSEY DAMJI COLLECTION.)

Like the artist of old, Syt. J. M. Ahivasi, has here captured the spirit of his subject. The depth in distance, the contrast of dark masses with diffused light, the tender gestures of the encircling birds and animals the restive emaciated body and the willed head and mind curbing it and leading it to see and listen to the unperturbed harmony the saint listens to and sees with enraptured eyes, are accomplished by the artist's own idiom.

[See Pages 7 & 14]

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in learned monographs and elaborate text books, not in books out of books, the peculiarly pet pastime of romantic "revivalists". The message of beauty, as you will presently see, is brought from the museum and the library to the homes and the streets. I shall let your eyes judge, not your memory, nor your sentiment.

Contact with Live Realities

And, as they begin to function you will observe how the paintings at Ajanta, the Pahari and Rajasthani paintings, the Mughal paintings, were achieved by those who were, in the highest sense, of the people, in direct contact and understanding of live realities and immediate environment. They were not the outcome, as our fraternity of pundits would lead us to believe, of extraneous and super-imposed "schools" and "symbols", borrowed mannerisms and conventions.

of the schools
& a priest

They were followers
by temp & [illegible]

Means as End of Art

Nor were they the outcome of the literary debates and priestly decalogues of the romantic "revivalists" which at present sanction and prescribe antique-looking media and technique and thus subordinate the end to the means of art. I have with me only a few examples of modern effort. I find it difficult to collect examples of undistracted or rather "un-formulated" art. But I have one example which I shall show you. Syt. J. M. Ahivasi's "Bhakta Haridas" is that example. And it indicates the elements of art and of permanent value I have suggested. The academic art that has been sought to be imposed on us is the result of the loud activites of the learned clerks of the "revival" who seek and understand no more than just the marks of indentification with the past. They have brought into prominence the schooled mechanics who reproduce antique with profitable fidelity and obtain easy reputations as "masters" and "artists".

the high light
of water is
uniform the
treatment is
typical [illegible]

Clever Mechanics

These fashionable tally clerks have thrown the creative artist into the background because he is without the trade labels. They have fostered "styles" which are obviously "art for art's sake." They distort history to suit their approved distortions in technique and convention. They cannot find life in art or art in life. How seldom has the creative artist been guided to understand and appreciate, for example, the cut, pattern or colour of the drapery, costume, ornaments he still, fortunately, sees in daily life, on living beauties?

Revived' Distortions

I show you the relation between the old paintings, costumes, drapery and the ornaments of the people. The home-crafts and furniture, some of the examples I am showing to-night, were, again, the inspiration of the ancient artist. How is it that we miss that inspiration in the paintings that are now "revived," that are uniformly and mechanically distorted for the nebulous spiritual aims or "cosmic" and "mystic" emotions? Are these not art for art's sake, for exhibitionism? They are, certainly, not for life's sake? I am also showing some of the modern examples of the home-crafts still fortunately left with us.

Sculpture as
Arithmetic, not Art.

The study of Indian sculpture is still a problem, more or less, of arithmetic, of the enumeration of symbolic devices, of iconographic details. Were it not for some of the discriminate scholars in Europe, the appreciation and study of Indian sculpture, as an aspect of art rightly claiming its examination and estimate from the point view distinctly, if not wholly, of art, would perhaps have remained for ever submerged under the flood of romantic and superlative verbiage that has hitherto been passing muster as *art* criticism and appreciation.*

Then we owe again
to the West for
appreciation

---

* For the detailed reference see the section on "The Study of Indian Sculpture" in my book on "Rock-Cut Temples Around Bombay."

Perverse Dance Notions

And, the study of the dance in India is not yet emancipated from the bazar atrocities. But it threatens to be a drawing room fashion. For the educated women, who remain mostly uneducated in art, have been, naturally, misguided by the literary appreciation of the "revivalists" founded on literal transcripts from religious codes and canonic ritual. One of the most significant features of the uniformly mechanical expositions of Indian art patented by the literary "revivalists" could be easily noticed in the manner in which they have, almost without exception, overlooked the position, the examination and description of socio-religious and folk-dances.

And, it is one of the tragic anomalies of the art conditions in India, brought about by the blind "revivalists", that a live form of the dance, like the *garba* and the *rasa*, still a vital form of socio-religious and folk art, still practised uncontaminated by pre-conceived and antiquarian theories, should have now been sought to be, mostly by educated women and men infected with the romance of the "revival", vitiated by perverse notions borrowed from the "Nautch" on the one hand and from the vagaries and atrocities of the commercial stage and screen on the other. Consequently, it is, I feel convinced, the mission particularly of women, educated in art, to rescue the most ancient and noblest of arts from its present deplorable state and restore it its ancient social as well intellectual status and cultural value. We shall again, examine the example of the sculpture and dance in India, ancient and modern, from the point of view I have attempted to define this evening. We shall, again, let our eyes function and see the vivid and intimate relation between art and life, between one form of art and another.

She [illegible] as much
Art as [illegible]

The Re-born Art.

Art must be indeed re-born, for, there is, as Sister Nivedita offers the message, "no voice like that of art to reach the people. A song, a picture these are the fiery cross that reaches all the tribes and makes them one. And art will be re-born, for she has found a new subject—India herself. Ah, to be a thinker in bronze and give to the world the beauty of the Southern Pariah as he swings, scarce-clad, along the Beach-road at Madras! Ah, to be Millet, and paint the woman worshiping at dawn beside the sea; oh, for a pencil that would interpret the beauty of the Indian Sari, the gentle life of village and temple, the coming and going at the Ganges, the play of the children–but far more, on behalf of India herself, do we need artists, half poets and half draftsmen, who can wake in us the great new senses?" And, shall we add the great new dynamic power?

Americanism

Beauty in Homes.

The tranquil beauty you see in this old Rajput painting is beauty as she still lingers in our homes. She lingers and, quite likely, may languish unless and until art and beauty are once again welcomed and enthroned in the home, until once again they inspire the creative artist who also lingers but might ultimately languish, and fade away. And, here is the swing in the picture and the pencil and brush of the Rajput artist has not only given us the beauty of the Indian *Sari*, Sister Nivedita looked for, the artist has also given us the feeling of open air life, gentle breeze, of undistracted joy, of art intimate with life. These are the values we are fighting for.

Colourful Audacity.

They picture and communicate life, visualised and composed as a picture of beauty, free, strong, happy and tranquil with the luminous, colourful, audacity of the open air and with the dynamic potentialities and regenerative force of the unchanging elements. It is for the women of India to shatter the provincial barriers which exist at present between the workers in the common region of the nation's art and cultural reconstruction. It is for them to remove the barriers which keep art aloof and isolated from the realities of life and to re-introduce into every home the colourful audacity of open-air life which Indian art interprets and inspires.

NOTES ON THE ILLUSTRATIONS.

"Nowadays we have no more the patriot, the verist, the positivist but the imperialist, the mystic, the aesthete or however else they are called. The modern mystic is Catholic, neo-Catholic, Fransican, ascetic, but if you call him Catholic, do not question him about the fundamental ideas of Catholicism; if he calls himself a Fransican or an ascetic do not let him pretend that he truly loves poetry or thinks seriously of retiring into, the desert. The aesthetic, if he is an artist, longs for an art that is not capable of expression in words, in lines or in colours!"

—*B. Croce.* (*"La Letteratura della Nuova Italia"*)

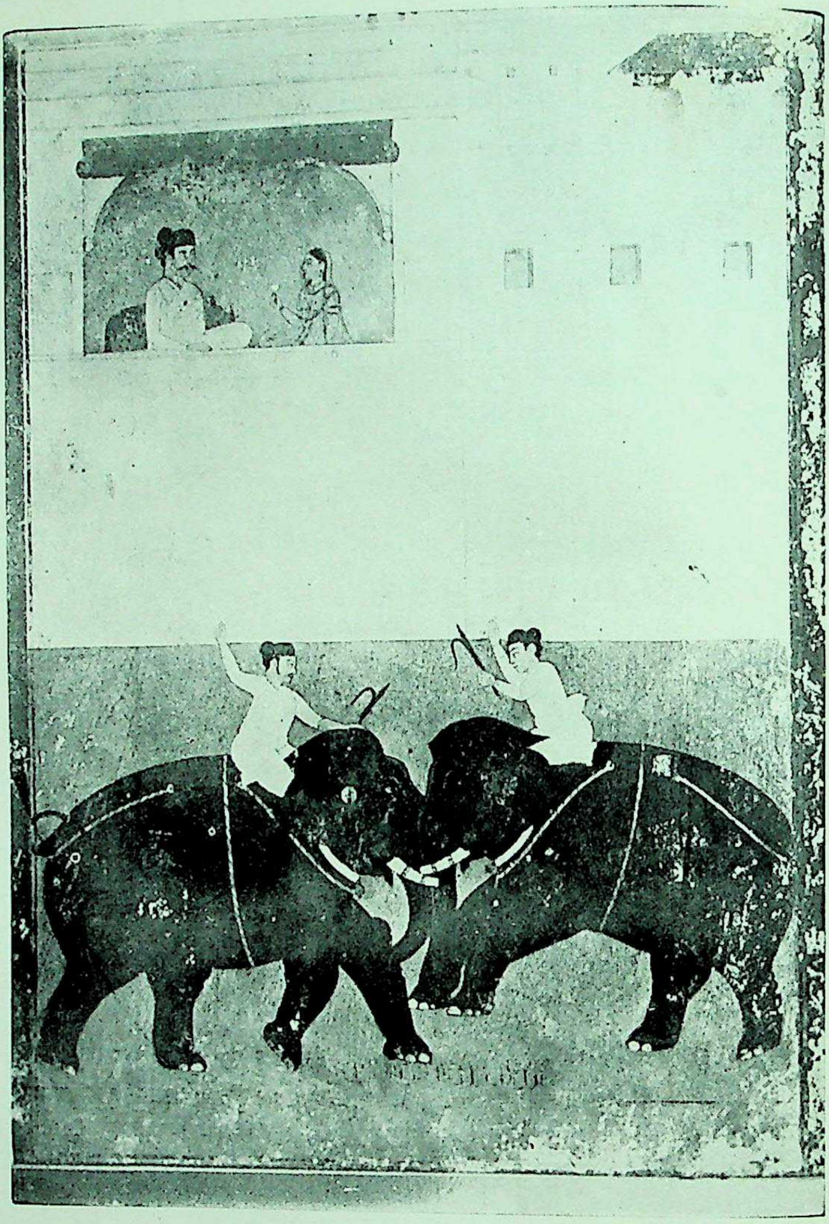
Over seventy magic lantern slides illustrated my exposition, contained in the pages which precede, of the values of Indian art. They were specially prepared from objects of art, past and present, to indicate their specific relation with the daily life and environment of the country. I wish I could publish all the pictures of paintings, sculpture, dancing, architecture and the various art home-crafts, ancient and modern, I prepared for the purpose. It would, obviously, have rendered the task of re-interpreting the past artistic achievements and of re-vitalising the present art tendencies easier. But that is not to be. They will have to wait for a future occasion.

In the meantime, I have chosen six examples, three from ancient art and three from modern. My friend Prof. Claude Batley, of the Architectural Section of the Sir J. J. School of Art is, I learn, shortly publishing a volume illustrative of the modern buildings in Indian designs and motifs erected recently in Bombay. When that is published, I am sure the change in the city's environment effected by the architects in Bombay will be more than apparent and will demand more than the ancient academic precedents which the romantic antiquarians have been with fond content offering the world as information on *present* conditions of Indian architecture. I have, therefore, selected the six examples of painting, sculpture and dancing.

Paintings

The picture in colour reproduced on the frontispiece is an example of the Kangra Kalam and is classified as a "Ragini" picture. Leave these terms to the archaeologist and to the trader in antique but try to look at the picture.

THE FIGHTING ELEPHANTS.



The dominant note of determined movement is clearly brought out. The lines are not twisted to advertise, like the lines of the mechanical craftsmen of the "revived" paintings, the superimposed "school" or "style" of the artist.

[See Page 15.]

Observe the peaceful environment and the tranquility on the terrace, the birds and animals and the temple in the distance and the cool shade of the tree near by and note how the happy smile of the brightly attired woman is continued in the alert gaze of the deer and the peacocks as well as in the soft recline of the musical instrument.

The artist speaks, no doubt, in his chosen idiom, his " kalam ". His idiom, the technical pecularities of his "kalam", is only the means he finds appropriate for his subject, not the end. The end is the picture. The picture is not an advertisement of his idiom. The lines of the drapery, the colours of the costume, cushioned seat, pillow, musical instrument, the shape of the ornaments were not read about and composed from memorised formula by the artist. They were *seen* by the artist in daily life.

Pass on to the next picture. ("The Hindola") Here again the artist seeks the environment of daily life to supply the significant supplement to his picture. Contrast the gay movement, restlessness and melancholy of this picture with the tranquil atmosphere of the previous picture, and note also the characteristic change in the lines of the drapery. If you must know it and appear erudite and "authentic", the picture is of the "Rajasthani" order or "kalam" of painting. But the knowlege will not help you if your eyes also will not help you.

Take again the picture of the fighting elephants The prominent note of determined movement is clearly brought out. The lines are not twisted to advertise, like the lines of the mechanical craftsman of the "revived" paintings, the "school" and "style" of the artist. The relief given by the unperturbed couple across the courtyard is not one of planes forced by a "school".

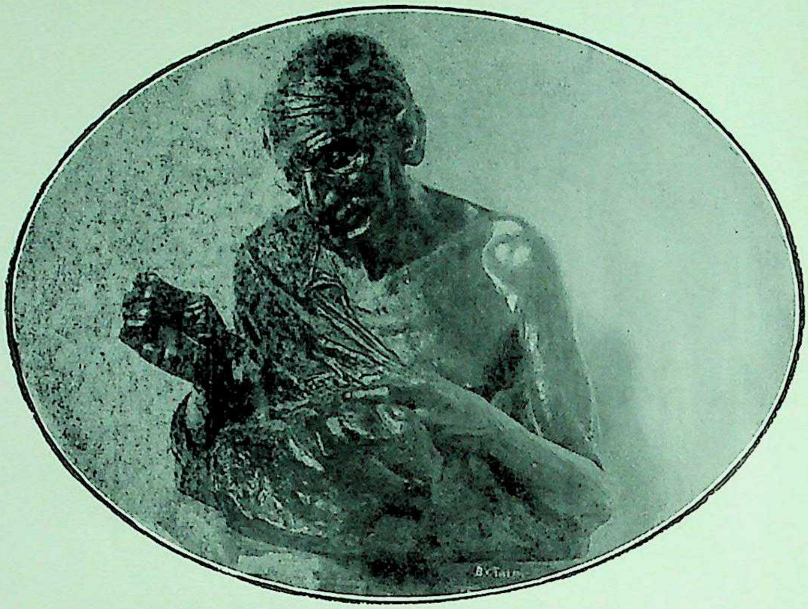
The artist, again, *saw* the picture and is recounting his experience in the idiom known to him and felt himself competent to handle.

The terrace in the first, the fields in the second and the courtyard in the third should be more than sufficient to suggest that the artist of old had not less the open eyes and mind than the open air which he employed to such effective purpose. Such examples of undistracted art are conspicuous by their absence in the "revived" paintings which reproduce mechanically and blindly the letter, the technical mannerisms, "Kalam" of the old paintings without the environment, the eyes mind and spirit of the artist of old.

Syt. J. M. Ahivasi's "Bhakta Haridas", depicting the serene absorption of the devotee and master-musician at peace with the universe, the Guru of Tan Sen the world-renowned musician, one of the "gems", of the Court of Akbar the Great, is one of the very few examples of modern Indian painting unidentified with the copied technical mannerisms of any of the "revived" paintings. He has not reproduced any of the "kalams" or "style." Like the artist of old he has captured the spirit of his subject. The depth in distance, the contrast of dark masses with diffused light the tender gestures of the encircling birds and animals, the restive emaciated body and the willed head and mind curbing it and leading it to see and listen to the unperturbed harmony the saint listens to and sees with enraptured eyes are accomplished by the artist's own idiom, his own experience. They are not the outcome of the blindly loyal reproduction of any technical mannerisms "revived" from the past.

Syt. Ahivasi's "Mangal Kala" and his mural decorative work in the Committee Room "A"-North Block-of

"POVERTY"



(SIR J. J. SCHOOL OF ART COLLECTION.)

Syt. B. V. Talim speaks here in the idiom truly native to him. He has pictured the values of life as he sees around him. The old man sews and with every movement, up and down, of the thread and the needle, it would seem, the stark despair of the man acquires its crushing rhythm. The loose lips, the drooping eyes, the rag tied round the head, lest it went hopelessly crazy, the projecting bones and the tattered garment thrown over the ribs complete the coherent, live, picture. It is more than the reproduction of the obvious, of apparent facts, of mere collection or accentuation of passing comments. By its profound reticence and restraint it evokes the desire, if not altogether the aspiration, to seek life anew.

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State Museum, LUCKNOW.

the Secreteriat at New Delhi are again examples of modern Indian painting untainted by the wooden formula of the antiquarians or of the doctrinaire prescription and decalogues of the high-priests and pundits interested in sterile "schools" and exclusive castes and creeds.*

Sculpture

Syt. B. V. Talim's "Poverty" is another example of art untainted by literary distractions. It is not a specimen of copy-book exercise in a dead "school" or "style" of "revived" art. The study of Indian sculpture, it is now beginning to be realised, has been hitherto obscured by the romantic antiquarians. We have yet the uncontrolled archaic speculations about the Hellenic "origin" and "influence" on Indian sculpture. And, the examination of the art values of Indian sculpture has proceeded no further than its iconographic identification varied occasionally by entirely superfluous philosophic dissertations. So that, the Indian sculptor of the present times, if he desires to win the "authentic" seal and certificate from the high-priests and pundits of Indian art, has only to "revive" Indian sculpture by reproducing at random any example of sculpture from the past. He would obtain the maximum of recognition if he could copy the maximum number of easily identifiable traits from, say, the sulptures of Sanchi, Amravati, or better still Orissa.

Syt. Talim's "Poverty" is not a "revived" exercise in "style" or "school". It is the outcome of his own observation and experience. And, he speaks in the idiom truly native to him. He has pictured the values of life, as he sees around him. The old man sews and with every movement, up and down, of the thread and the needle, it would seem, the stark despair of the man acquires its crushing rhythm. The loose lips, the drooping eyes, the rag tied round the head, lest it went hopelessly crazy, the projecting bones and the tattered garment thrown over the ribs complete the coherent, live, picture. It is more than the reproduction of the obvious, of apparent facts, of mere collection or accentuation of passing comments. The picture is eloquent by its significant reticence. If one might so compare it, Rodin's celebrated picture of the "Hag" creates horror whereas this picture by Syt. Talim evokes, by its profound reticence and restraint, the desire, if not altogether the aspiration, to see and seek life anew. It is in bronze and has been acquired by the Sir J. J. School of Art, Bombay, and, rightly, occupies its place of prominence in the vestibule of the School.

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*Syt. J. M. Ahivasi's picture entitled "Painting" at New Delhi is reproduced as frontispiece in colour in the book "Mural Paintings of the Bombay School" by W. E. Gladstone Solomon, Director of Sir J. J. School of Art and Curator, Art Section, of the Prince of Wales Museum.

Dancing

Like almost every form of art in India sought to be "revived" from the past, dancing has continued to be the subject of fervent literary appreciation. It was believed to be only and solely "religious." And, its aim was, presumably, to copy and reproduce machanically the gestures and poses which the surviving temple rituals, or worse, books on rituals prescribed. The confusion of thought, characteristic of the fashionably "mystic" lyricism that has for decades overtaken and obstructed the advancement of art in India, reached the absurd phase when the ritual temple dances of the South and the "Nautch" of the North were with entire indiscrimination called "classic!" To complete the confusion, they were also accepted or rather described as "Oriental." So

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that, anything, any gesture, pose, costume from anywhere between Spain across the Mediteranean to Japan was "Oriental." The glorified tally clerks, the high-priests and pundits of art in India, sought the identification marks, applied the approved labels, overlooked the dancer, as artist, and failed to grasp the inherent worth of dancing as significant art.

The omission, almost absolute, of all mention of social, socio-religious, communal or vocational dancing and the mechanical transcription of literary modes were typical of the fundamentally academic and superficial mental attitude of the romantic "revivalists." Dancing thus shared the misfortune, common to all "revived" arts in India, of their uninformed attention and lyric enthusiasm. But dancing, like architecture, and sculpture required more than obviously similar and conventional identification marks on paper. The transcription from ancient codes and conventions in dancing could neither be literal nor literary.

What was endeavoured to be achieved with more or less impunity and in some measure with credible "popular" success in painting could not be achieved in dancing. But the romantic antiquarians struggle even now with their pet literal and literary transcription of ancient modes, for the "revival" of Indian dancing.

The restive mind and the irrepressible desire for novelty has led the West to seek inspiration from everywhere. Its music halls, the stage and the screen are beginning to escape from the primitive idea of easily identified ancient modes, "Oriental" or non-"Oriental," to obtain and examine the fundamentals of dancing as a significant and vital art. For example, exponents and critics of dancing in the West are no longer satisfied merely with examining the degree of "authentic" Spanish dancing of, say, Argentina or Escudero. And, although New York critics are said to have not yet made up their minds as to whether Escudero's dancing is folk art or "fine" art, it is beginning to be recognised that it is *what "folk art becomes when it is highly sophisticated and yet still communal." The Spanish contribution in dancing implies, we are told, "a return to an old attitude which has been expelled from western tradition by accident of social and political history which are rapidly passing away. We are faced nowadays by great social groups tired of only sharing in dramatic emotions by way of phantasy and eager to come alive themselves."

Accidents of social and political history, to use the expressive phrase by Mr. Langdon-Davies, relegated until very recently dancing in India, to the rituals in the temples. the preoccupation of "Deva–Dasis", or the contemptible "Nautch"–appendage of decadent courts. It had neither social, nor intellectual nor artistic status. The intelligentsia in India got fervently busy only when a Pavlova was seen seeking inspiration from Indian dancing or when Ruth St. Dennis apsired to offer more than the "type" dancing in "Marwari" or "Temple" dancing, the themes which usually mark the limit of the general knowledge and understanding of Indian dancing. Fed and brought up on a diet of adjectives about the "glories" of Indian art, the romantic antiquarians confronted with this new phenomenon could offer only more adjectives and seek identification marks from ancient codes. They proceeded in a fashion identical with the fashions which "revived" painting. They sought literal transcripts from the "Nautch" and the temple rituals of the South, called both of them with perfect indiscrimination "classic" and

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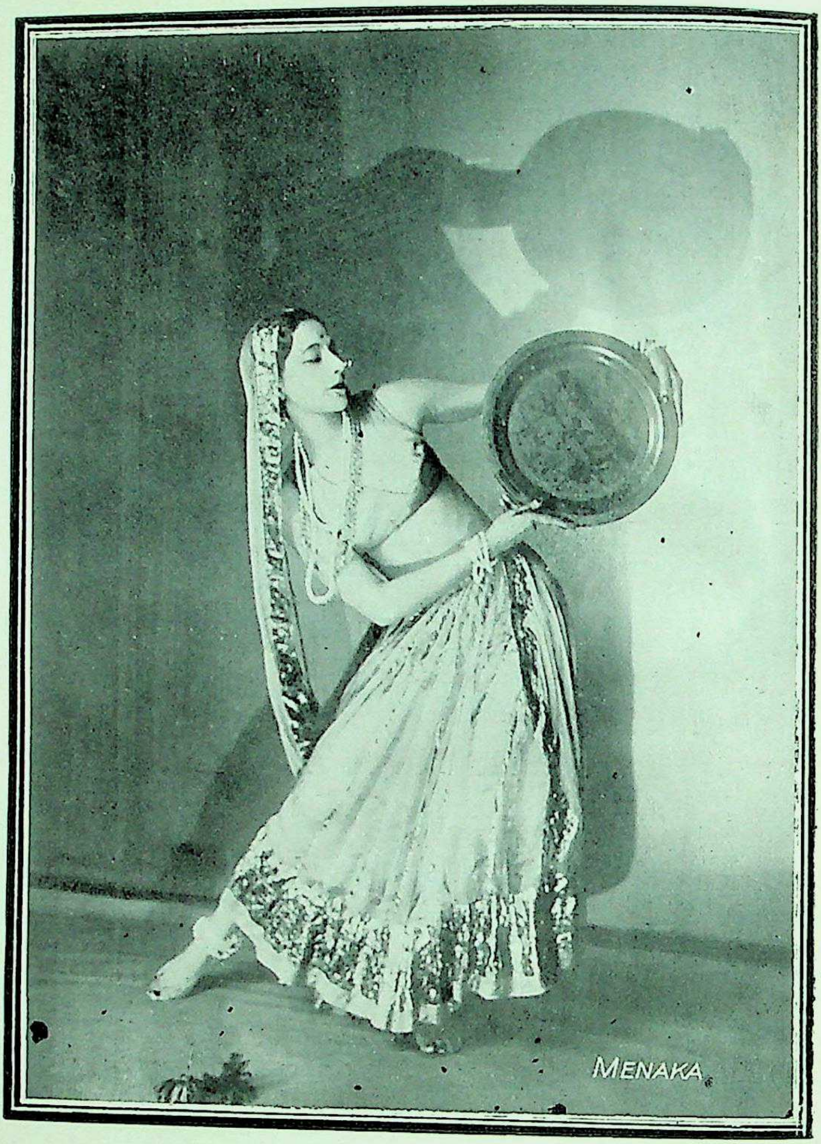
*"Cabaret Art;" By John Langdon-Davies-Theatre Arts Monthly (December 1932)

" YOVANA–NRITYA "



The song of the birds, the blossoming trees and plants, the folk dance and festivals and the sprinkling of colour all proclaim joy. There is *Vasant* in the Maiden's heart. And, "Yovana-Nritya" the Dance of Youth proclaims the joy, the ecstacy of newly stirred impulses and dreams of youth

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began their usual search for "authentic" formula from literature for the "revival" of the art of dancing!

When "Menaka" (Srimati Leila Sokhey) first boldly undertook nearly six years ago the interpretation of Indian dancing, she had to confront and survive not only the novelty of an enlightened widely-travelled Hindu woman of her position taking to dancing seriously but to escape as well the attentions of the literary pundits who, as usual, sought the accustomed adjectives and, as usual, lost all grasp of art. The literary labels, which they fondly believed were interchangeable,–"religious" "Oriental", "classic," and "mystic", or "cosmic",–were not very helpful. Those of us mainly responsible for designing her dances had to distinguish them by their inspiration from folk-dances and from ancient paintings and sculptures which were certainly more reliable, practically helpful and "authentic" than the literary concepts and doctrinaire codes that have been, in strange preversion of language and thought, continued to be designated as "ideals" of Indian art. This was the greatest surprise for the romantic "revivalists" who could not go beyond the "Nautch" and the "Dev-Dasi" rituals which they identified with complete inconsistency as "religious," "mystic," "cosmic" and "classic." They had neither the open mind nor the open eyes to see or understand the importance, significance and value of the root foundation of Indian dancing observable even to this day in folk, communal, vocational and social dancing.

We had also to distinguish the costumes for Indian dancing which were till then mostly appropriated from the "Oriental" atrocities of the West! I wish I could reproduce here the slides I prepared to illustrate the tragic paradox. The adaptation of Indian music and the requisite assistance of responsively skillful artistes was, perhaps, our biggest piece of resistance. For, the elegant community of romantic lyrists that has been for decades elaborating on the rhythmic element of Indian music and its inalienable connection with dancing had, incredible as it may appear, overlooked to examine, in actual practice, its possibilities for Indian dancing!

This is only one of the incredible paradoxes of the romantic "revival," or to call it by its bigger and more imposing name "renaissance," of Indian art. For it will be recalled that the close interdependence of architecture and sculpture have been the stereyotyped, pet, theme of the "revivalists. But that interdependence has seldom been practically or specifically examined! Were it not for the skilled practical assistance of artists of enlightenment like Kumari Madri P. Desai and her friends and colleagues our undertaking would have been more of an academic novelty rather than the art enterprise we aspired to. "Menaka's" dance recital, arranged at the Excelsior Theatre, Bombay particularly for Mme. Anna Pavlova, showed that we had marched forward from aspiration to appreciably distinct achievement. With the world-reputed generosity of the greatest dance-artist of her day and age, Mme. Pavlova offered one evening the stage facilities and resources of her Company, during her extremely busy season in Bombay, for the Indian dance recital of "Menaka." The art enterprise and the tribute "Menaka" earned that evening have been significant history.

Indian dancing was recognised as dancing, as a vital form of art, not a woodenly "mystic" essay, nor as a series of vaguely "oriental" flat, meaningless, lantern-slide poses. Indian music was not only related to dancing it was visualised and experienced as inherently and logically artistic, not merely as a clever onslaught of routinised technique. "Menaka's" "Yovana-Nritya" began from the beginning. I shall cite its description from the programme:—"It is *Vasant*, the Spring season. The song of the birds, the blossoming trees and plants, the folk-dance and festivals and the sprinkling of colour all proclaim joy. There is *Vasant* in the maiden's heart. And, Yovana Nritya the Dance of Youth, proclaims the joy, the ecstacy, of newly-stirred impulses and dreams of youth."

This is where women in India educated in art, should begin. Or, put it the other way, this is where enlightened women in India should begin their education in art. That is the sole and indispensable condition of its enduring uplift. Its root foundation is to be sought to in the collective life, vocations and surroundings of the people of the country. Its uplift as vital art must therefore originate from within, not super-imposed by elegant, ego-centric poses, lyric abstractions or literary attitudes. Art should cease to be just so many soft posturings for, we are, as Mr. John Langdon-Davies has indicated with apt force, "faced nowadays by great social groups tired of only sharing in dramatic emotions by way of phantasy and eager to come alive themselves." If the enlightened women of India could so plan and determine, they could, as they should, with the assistance of the live art of dancing, help the great community of the people to wake up, to realise their common artistic heritage and destiny and to "come alive themselves." The West has begun to recognise the futility of a "sterile opera audience," of the "sophisticated bourgeois art, head rather than heart, of a leisured intelligentsia. The stultifying fate of society grand opera is only what all European art has had to face and of what Spanish art has escaped;"*—and, let us add, of what Indian art must escape, if it aspires to exist. The englightened women of India could help Indian art to escape the "stultifying fate."

They could learn now to see the beauty, as they have learnt to know the humanity, of the "Harijans," of, "the Southern Pariah as he swings, scarce-clad, along the Beach–Road at Madras," the beauty which Sister Nivedita *saw* years ago.

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*"Cabaret Art," By John Langdon–Davies, "Theatre Arts Monthly" (December 1932).

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